



The Impact of Existentialism on Modern Society's Value Judgments: An Analysis through Camus' Absurdist Trilogy

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Abstract. This article explores the profound impact of existentialism on modern society's value judgments through an analysis of Albert Camus' Absurdist Trilogy. In the aftermath of two world wars and the tumultuous 20th century, existentialism emerged as a philosophical response, asserting that life lacks inherent meaning, and individuals must forge their own purpose. Camus' trilogy, consisting of "Caligula," "The Misunderstanding," and "The Rebel," serves as a poignant reflection of the collective disillusionment and existential crises that marked his era. Through these works, Camus challenges traditional religious and moral perspectives, emphasizing individual freedom and responsibility, encouraging rebellion against injustice, and prompting profound reflections on the meaning of life and interpersonal relationships. The themes of the absurdity of life, individual autonomy, rebellion, and loneliness resonate deeply with contemporary society, shaping our understanding of value judgments and our place in a complex and interconnected world.

Keywords: Existentialism, Albert Camus, Absurdist Trilogy

1 Introduction

Rapid Existentialism, born in the aftermath of two world wars and the horrors of the 20th century, posits that life lacks inherent meaning, and individuals must create their own purpose. Camus' exploration of this philosophy in his trilogy serves as a poignant reflection of the collective disillusionment and existential crises that marked his era.

Through "Caligula," Camus presents the absurdity of unchecked power and the loss of human values when absolute authority reigns^[1]. This resonates with contemporary society's skepticism towards authoritarianism and its emphasis on personal freedoms.

"The Misunderstanding" highlights the tragic consequences of miscommunication and the isolation it can breed. In today's digitally connected yet emotionally distant world, Camus' portrayal of the breakdown in human relationships finds a stark parallel.

In "The Rebel," Camus contemplates the ethical implications of rebellion against oppressive systems. This work prompts modern society to question the moral responsibility of standing up against injustice, shedding light on the importance of collective action and societal change.

Furthermore, Camus' portrayal of the human condition, marked by existential despair, resonates with individuals in contemporary society who grapple with similar feelings of uncertainty and disorientation in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

In essence, Albert Camus' Absurdist Trilogy, steeped in existentialist philosophy, continues to shape, and challenge modern society's perspectives on values^[1]. It serves as a mirror reflecting the anxieties, aspirations, and ethical dilemmas of the present age, compelling us to reconsider the meaning of life, the significance of personal freedoms, the importance of human connections, and the moral imperative of standing up against injustice.

In this article, we will delve into the profound impact of existentialism, as portrayed through Camus' works, on the way modern society perceives and evaluates values.

2 The Absurdity of Life and Meaninglessness

Camus' literary oeuvre delves deep into the profound concept of life's absurdity and its inherent meaninglessness. With unwavering conviction, he asserts that humanity's existence unfolds within an unforgiving cosmos, completely devoid of any divine presence. This stark reality leads to the inescapable conclusion that life lacks any inherent purpose or intrinsic value. Such a challenging perspective has served as a catalyst, compelling individuals to embark on a relentless quest to reassess the very essence of their existence in a world seemingly stripped of ultimate truths and guiding principles.

In the realm of existentialist philosophy, Camus' insights have borne the weight of intellectual scrutiny and contemplation^[2]. They force us to confront the disquieting notion that our existence is but a fleeting flicker in an indifferent universe. In this context, the conventional notions of meaning, morality, and purpose become elusive, if not altogether illusory.

This philosophical reckoning has had profound implications for the tapestry of contemporary society's value systems. In the wake of Camus' thought-provoking narratives, we observe a seismic shift away from the traditional moral and religious constructs that have long governed our ethical compass. Instead, we find ourselves standing on the precipice of a brave new world, one where relativistic ethical frameworks take root.

In this brave new world, individuals are entrusted with the formidable responsibility of forging their own meaning and values. They are no longer content to rely on the dogmas and precepts handed down by previous generations. Instead, they confront the daunting task of creating their unique moral codes and purpose in life^[2].

This existential awakening has ushered in an era where moral relativism flourishes. It acknowledges that there is no single, universally applicable set of moral standards but rather a myriad of ethical perspectives coexisting in a dynamic, ever-evolving social

landscape. As such, individuals are empowered to discern their own values and principles, resulting in a rich tapestry of diverse belief systems that shape our contemporary society.

Camus' exploration of life's absurdity and meaninglessness has resonated deeply with modern society, challenging age-old conventions and inspiring a reevaluation of our core values. It has spurred individuals to confront the existential void and to embark on the profoundly personal journey of creating purpose and meaning in a world that appears to offer none. This philosophical transformation continues to echo through the corridors of our collective consciousness, shaping the way we perceive and navigate the complexities of our existence^[3].

3 Individual Freedom and Responsibility

Camus' writings powerfully emphasize the significance of individual freedom and the weight of personal responsibility. Within the vivid tapestry of his narratives, characters are thrust into the disorienting abyss of a world stripped of absolute truths or clear moral guidelines. This existentialist perspective paints a stark portrait of existence in which individuals must grapple with the profound implications of personal autonomy and moral accountability.

One compelling example from Camus' work is found in "The Stranger," where the protagonist, Meursault, becomes the embodiment of existential solitude and individual agency. Meursault's life unfolds in a seemingly indifferent universe, and his actions are driven not by societal norms but by his own internal compass. His decision to kill the Arab on the beach, devoid of clear motives or moral justification, epitomizes the existentialist theme of individual responsibility in a world devoid of inherent meaning^[4].

In modern society, Camus' exploration of individual freedom and responsibility resonates deeply. The existentialist perspective invites individuals to confront the profound realization that their choices are not determined by external moral absolutes or divine mandates. Rather, they must navigate the labyrinth of life's moral ambiguities and uncertainties, making choices that carry profound consequences for themselves and others.

This existentialist challenge has left an indelible mark on contemporary society. It compels individuals to grapple with the weight of their actions and decisions, acknowledging that they are not merely passive participants but active agents in shaping their lives and the world around them. In a world marked by moral relativism, this emphasis on personal accountability is both liberating and daunting, prompting individuals to consider not only the immediate consequences of their actions but also their broader implications for society.

Furthermore, Camus' philosophy underscores the importance of contemplating the interplay between individual actions and their impact on others. In a world where moral certainties are elusive, individuals must engage in introspection and empathy, recognizing that their interactions with others can either perpetuate the existential absurdity or contribute to meaningful connections and understanding.

Camus' writings serve as a poignant reminder of the enduring relevance of existentialism in modern society. His exploration of individual freedom and responsibility, exemplified by characters like Meursault, challenges us to navigate the moral complexities of an uncertain world. As we confront our own choices and actions, we are prompted to acknowledge our role as architects of meaning and ethical agents in a world where personal autonomy and moral accountability reign supreme.

4 Rebellion and Political Insights

Camus' writings underscore the significance of individual freedom and responsibility. In his narratives, characters confront their choices and actions in a world lacking absolute truths or moral guidelines. This existentialist perspective places a profound emphasis on personal autonomy and moral accountability. As a result, contemporary society grapples with the notion that individuals are not only responsible for their actions but must also contemplate the consequences and their interactions with others.

Case Study 1: The Stranger

In Albert Camus' novel "The Stranger," the protagonist Meursault becomes a symbol of existential absurdity as he navigates a world that seems devoid of meaning. His pivotal act, the seemingly senseless murder of an Arab, thrusts him into a profound existential crisis. Meursault's actions, or perhaps more significantly, his indifference, serve as a poignant illustration of the existentialist perspective that individuals must face the consequences of their choices and grapple with the inherent absurdity of existence.

Meursault's existential journey begins with his apparent emotional detachment from life's conventions and societal expectations. He refuses to conform to the conventional expressions of grief at his mother's funeral, setting the stage for his estrangement from societal norms. This initial act of rebellion against social conventions foreshadows his later, more consequential transgression^[2].

When he kills the Arab on a sun-drenched beach, Meursault's actions defy any clear rationale. His motive remains elusive, and this senseless act underscores the existentialist belief that life is fundamentally irrational and lacks inherent meaning. This murder becomes a metaphor for the arbitrary nature of existence itself.

Meursault's subsequent trial serves as a stark reminder of society's expectations and its demand for conformity. The judicial system seeks to impose a rational framework onto his irrational act, highlighting the tension between individual freedom and societal norms. His apparent lack of remorse and failure to adhere to conventional moral standards further alienates him from the established order^[5].

Readers are forced to confront the complex interplay between personal freedom and societal expectations as they witness Meursault's trial and subsequent condemnation. Camus, through this case study, prompts us to consider whether society's judgment of Meursault is justifiable, given the existentialist backdrop of absurdity and moral ambiguity.

Meursault's journey in "The Stranger" serves as a compelling case study in existentialism. His senseless murder and the subsequent societal condemnation force readers to grapple with the intricate relationship between personal freedom and the expectations

of society. Meursault's actions reflect the existentialist idea that individuals must confront the consequences of their choices in a world that often lacks clear moral guidelines, inviting us to ponder the inherent absurdity of existence itself.

Case Study 2: Caligula

In Albert Camus' "Caligula," the protagonist, Caligula, serves as a striking embodiment of the existentialist exploration of individual freedom and responsibility. His character takes center stage as he seeks to exercise absolute freedom, unencumbered by any moral constraints. This narrative underscores the dangers inherent in unbridled individuality when divorced from moral responsibility, compelling us to critically examine the ethical limits of personal freedom in contemporary society^[4].

Caligula's character is a poignant representation of a person unshackled from societal norms and ethical considerations. In his pursuit of absolute freedom, he indulges in ruthless acts, including violence, cruelty, and manipulation. As he becomes increasingly tyrannical, he disrupts the lives of those around him and violates the moral fabric of society.

Through the lens of existentialism, Caligula's actions reveal the precarious nature of unregulated freedom. Existentialism encourages us to recognize the value of personal autonomy and choice, but it also reminds us that these freedoms come with a responsibility to consider the consequences of our actions on others. Caligula's descent into tyranny exemplifies the potential consequences when personal freedom becomes detached from ethical considerations.

This case study serves as a thought-provoking reflection on the ethical limits of personal freedom in contemporary society. It forces us to confront questions such as: How far can an individual go in the pursuit of their desires without crossing ethical boundaries? When does personal freedom transform into a threat to the well-being and rights of others? What role does society play in curbing the excesses of unbridled individuality^[6]?

In today's world, where individualism and personal autonomy are highly valued, the lessons from Caligula's story remain relevant. It reminds us that while personal freedom is a fundamental human right, it must be balanced with a sense of moral responsibility and consideration for the welfare of others. The ethical limits of personal freedom are defined not only by laws and regulations but also by our capacity for empathy, compassion, and ethical reflection.

Camus' portrayal of Caligula serves as a cautionary tale, urging us to contemplate the delicate balance between personal freedom and moral responsibility. It underscores the existentialist notion that true freedom is not the absence of constraints but the conscious recognition of our responsibilities towards others in the complex web of human existence. This case study invites us to engage in an ongoing dialogue about the ethical boundaries of personal freedom in our contemporary society.

5 Loneliness and Interpersonal Relationship

Within Camus' literary oeuvre, the theme of loneliness and estrangement is a pervasive undercurrent. This recurring motif serves as a reflection of the intricate web of complexity and alienation that characterizes contemporary society's interpersonal relationships. Camus' narratives act as a catalyst, compelling individuals to engage in a profound reevaluation of the intrinsic significance of authentic connections and understanding, particularly in light of the inherent absurdity and meaninglessness that permeate our existence^[7].

In Camus' exploration of solitude and detachment, he masterfully captures the dissonance that often exists between individuals in the modern world. His characters frequently grapple with the overwhelming sense of isolation, echoing the sentiments of many in society who find themselves navigating an increasingly fragmented and disconnected social landscape.

Camus' narratives compel readers to confront the challenges posed by a world where conventional belief systems and moral certainties have eroded. In this context, loneliness takes on a deeper significance as individuals must confront their existence without the comforting structures of tradition or absolutes to provide guidance. This isolation can be both a source of despair and an opportunity for introspection.

Moreover, Camus' writings serve as a poignant reminder of the value of genuine human connections amidst the backdrop of a seemingly indifferent universe. The characters in his works often yearn for meaningful interactions and seek solace in shared moments of understanding. In doing so, Camus prompts us to reconsider the importance of empathy, compassion, and authentic communication in an era marked by superficial interactions and digital disconnect.

The theme of loneliness and estrangement in Camus' literature transcends the pages of his works to illuminate the challenges inherent in modern society's interpersonal relationships. Through his exploration of this theme, Camus compels us to confront the isolation that can pervade our lives and underscores the profound need for authentic connections and understanding as we grapple with the absurdity and meaninglessness that define our existence. His narratives are a call to action, urging us to bridge the gaps that separate us and find solace in the shared experiences and empathetic bonds that make us truly human.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that Albert Camus' Absurdist Trilogy serves as a thought-provoking prism through which we can assess the profound influence of existentialism on contemporary society's value assessments. Camus' philosophical framework confronts and destabilizes established religious and moral doctrines, propounding a worldview that places paramount importance on individual autonomy and moral obligation. This ideology, rooted in existentialism, not only underscores the significance of personal liberty and accountability but also kindles a spirit of rebellion against prevailing injustices and oppressive societal structures^[8].

Furthermore, Camus' works elicit deep contemplation concerning the inherent meaninglessness and absurdity of existence, compelling individuals to embark on an introspective journey to discover purpose amidst the chaotic world. In parallel, his portrayal of loneliness and estrangement underscores the intricate dynamics of interpersonal relationships in the modern world, prompting a reevaluation of the authenticity and depth of human connections.

As we navigate an ever-evolving global landscape fraught with ethical and moral quandaries, Camus' existentialist insights continue to wield a substantial influence on our comprehension of value judgments and our role within the contemporary milieu. In a world where the boundaries of morality are continually tested, Camus' philosophy serves as a guiding light, encouraging us to navigate the murky waters of existence with integrity, autonomy, and a commitment to challenging the status quo when necessary. In essence, the legacy of Camus endures as a beacon illuminating the path to ethical reflection and personal responsibility in our modern era.

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